

## **AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

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Campus-based Academic Program Review Update  
Coordinating Board for Higher Education  
June 10, 2004

### **DESCRIPTION**

The board's commitment to ensure the quality of academic programs includes policies for the review of new academic proposals and, for public four-year institutions, regular review of existing academic programs. This latter process of engaging in campus-based academic program reviews, also known as campus-based reviews (CBR), involves an examination of institutional policies, practices, and actions associated with the performance of existing academic programs. In addition to data associated with results that institutions should review annually, e.g., graduation rates, student performance on exit examinations, and job placement information, public four-year institutions are working with the MDHE staff to identify and improve key education quality processes that generate these and related results. The types of processes that are essential to drive performance improvement of teaching and learning as well as appropriate roles for the state and the institutional leadership are being explored. Once redesigned, CBR will serve as one of several key aspects of the department's quality initiative. The intent of this board item is to provide an update about the status of revisions to the state's CBR requirements.

### **Background**

For over 20 years, Missouri public four-year institutions have been required by the CBHE to review their existing academic programs on a regular five-year cycle with approximately 20 percent of the programs reviewed annually. Institutions are given latitude in determining the sequence that best satisfies scheduling requirements. These reviews have tended to emphasize ways to strengthen programs and to identify and reinforce institutional priorities. Originally, full reviews were submitted to the MDHE and reported to the board in detail. Over time, the process changed to involve submission of executive summaries only. Board members were notified which programs underwent reviews during a given fiscal year and were given access to the full review upon request. While many two-year institutions also engage in a regular review of existing academic programs, the board's policy environment has not required the systematic submission of information related to public two-year campus-based reviews.

During the past year, questions have been raised by MDHE staff about ways to revise CBR to improve performance at public four-year institutions. Conclusions from previous evaluations of the state CBR requirements suggest that there was significant variation in the quality of data provided. A consistent reporting format has not been used. An understanding of the quality processes, programmatic trends, and improvements within institutions and across the state has been limited. Questions have been raised about the utility of traditional program reviews based

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on the perception that they tended to be superficial, driven primarily by accountability demands, and did not assess education quality processes. Too often, faculty was perceived as not engaged in department-based structured conversations that focused on good practice and spurred improvement in teaching and learning.

In October 2003, the state regulations associated with CBR were postponed to provide MDHE staff an opportunity to work with chief academic officers in a redesign of CBR in both substance and approach. This decision was partially motivated by feedback received from many faculty and administrators who had been questioning the value of having to provide MDHE with annual executive summaries, which in many cases had become largely *pro forma*. Furthermore, in its review of higher education tuition levels, the state auditor recommended that the MDHE should collect data to determine the cost-effectiveness of existing academic programs and whether each program meets the school's mission. To accomplish this, the state auditor recommended that the department should ensure these reviews are independently and objectively completed.

Several campuses are in the midst of modifying institutional CBR policies to focus more directly on how to monitor academic standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Building on the principles of academic audit fostered by Dr. William Massy, president of the Jackson Hole higher Education Group, Inc., and author of *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education*, the University of Missouri has been actively involved in designing an alternative to traditional academic program review. Audit panels involving external members review self-evaluation documents and evidence related to academic quality processes. Additionally, the University of Missouri has other processes underway that evaluate departmental utilization of existing resources.

A workshop on CBR for chief academic officers of public four-year institutions jointly sponsored by the MDHE and the University of Missouri and facilitated by Dr. Massy was held on May 18, 2004. A panel of chief academic officers discussing existing CBR reports agreed that these reports are often afterthoughts and do not add value. During the discussion, participants stressed the importance of simplifying the process, of having a continuous process of engagement in systematic self-reflection, of utilizing external evaluators or auditors, and of having some connection to resource allocation, albeit at the margin. For many, CBR is still seen as a compliance model and in need of reform.

Dr. Massy discussed some basic differences between traditional program review and the process of academic audit. In the process of completing traditional program reviews, Massy suggested that evaluators tend to second-guess departments and often recommend more resources for the department to reach its potential. The process is difficult at best, the results are too predictable, and the faculty often remains disengaged.

In contrast, the academic audit focuses on educational processes to assure academic quality and continuous improvement. Rather than simply looking at results, auditors raise questions with faculty about the underlying processes at work in the life of professional educators. Key questions become: What knowledge, skills, and values will be taught? What teaching materials will be used? How will learning be achieved? How will faculty get feedback on the learning

process? How will the design goals be achieved day in and day out in the face of conflicting priorities? What quality assurance processes are in place?

In focusing on quality principles, additional concerns involve defining quality in terms of outcomes, focusing on how things get done, working collaboratively, basing decisions on evidence, striving for coherence, learning from best practices, and making continuous improvement a priority. Teaching and learning are not an afterthought, but are thrust front and center into the daily life of the department. In short, department personnel become engaged in discussing evidence for perceptions and attitudes about the effectiveness of teaching and learning in their unit.

### **Future Considerations**

Too often, assessment agendas, much less improvement agendas, are driven by external factors associated with demands for increased accountability. Without ownership and engagement by faculty, the amount of long-lasting change is limited. Concerning resource allocation, the question of whether a department is doing the best job with its available resources can and should be separated from questions about whether the institution should add investments or disinvest in a department's resource base.

The MDHE is looking for ways to instill more passion for continuous quality improvement as a driver for assessment and change. If successful, this activity should demonstrate greater accountability to the public and to key policymakers. Chief academic officers agreed that continuous attention to education quality processes, including incentives and disincentives at the margin dependent on participation, is an important goal for a redesign of CBR. At the same time, participants at the workshop suggested that an academic audit focused on education quality processes should not be considered as a substitute for an institution's responsibility in determining minimal results below which serious questions about resource allocation should be addressed.

In promoting a redesign of CBR to focus on education quality processes, questions remain about the role that the state can and should play in the process, the value the state can add by the questions it asks and the incentives it provides, and the leadership the state can provide for helping external constituents understand the relationship between education quality processes and performance results. While the unit of analysis for an institution that is promoting and evaluating education quality processes will be sub-units, e.g., departments, schools, centers, and individual programs, the state may want to use institutions as a unit of analysis for its questions and attention to education quality processes.

Chief academic officers suggested that the state might want to establish a corps of trained auditors (representatives from institutions) who could conduct audits at the institution level and at the department and programmatic levels. A working group of chief academic officers or their designees will be used to develop recommendations for a new approach to state regulations for CBR in both substance and approach.

By working with institutions to focus attention on education quality processes alongside a review of regular academic performance indicators and value-added student learning, MDHE will be reinforcing an agenda with institutions across several key criteria associated with quality initiatives. Furthermore, MDHE will be ensuring that process management associated with faculty roles in improving teaching and learning is given appropriate attention in addition to an emphasis on leadership roles, strategic planning, constituent concerns, the use of data and analysis, human resources, and results.

### **Conclusions**

As part of its commitment to move from a compliance model to an emphasis on quality principles and performance excellence, the MDHE is working with public four-year institutional representatives in revising state regulations associated with CBR. A revised CBR policy has the opportunity to change the nature of the conversation between the CBHE/MDHE and public four-year institutions concerning the assurance of educational quality processes associated with teaching and learning. Adaptations of CBR to public two-year institutions should be pursued as well. A revised CBR will be integrated into the MDHE quality improvement journey.

### **STATUTORY REFERENCE**

Section 173.005(7) CBHE statutory responsibility to collect the necessary information and develop comparable data for all institutions of higher education in the state . . .

Section 173.020(4) RSMo, CBHE statutory responsibility for designing a coordinated plan for higher education in the state . . .

Section 173.030(2) RSMo, CBHE statutory responsibility for recommending to governing boards of any institutions in the state the development, consolidation, or elimination of programs, degree offerings, physical facilities or policy changes where that action is deemed . . . in the best interests of the institution . . . and or the general requirements of the state.

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

This is an information item only.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

None